

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE: A PERSISTENT BARRIER TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

DANG, EMMANUEL ISTIFANUS

Department of Social Science Education,
Faculty of Education,
University of Jos.
+2347069022611 dange@unijos.edu.ng

MUGU, JULIANA YUSUFU

Department of Social Science Education,
Faculty of Education,
University of Jos.
+234 806 548 7244 muguj@unijos.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper explored economic violence, a critical yet often overlooked barrier to women's empowerment in developing countries. Economic violence encompasses discriminatory practices that disadvantage women economically, including unequal pay, limited access to resources, and exploitative working conditions. Drawing on recent research, the paper examines the multifaceted nature of economic violence. It highlights how structural inequalities, fuelled by patriarchal norms and inadequate legal protections, perpetuate economic violence and limit women's opportunities. The paper also explores the intersectional nature of economic violence, where factors like race, ethnicity, and class further marginalize vulnerable groups. The paper acknowledges the limitations of existing interventions and proposes a more comprehensive approach. This includes legal reforms to protect women's rights, investments in education and healthcare, and challenging discriminatory social norms. It emphasizes the need for collaboration between governments, NGOs, and international actors to achieve gender equality and inclusive development. Key areas explored in the paper include Prevalence and forms of economic violence; Drivers and structural barriers: unequal access to resources, patriarchal norms, and limited legal protections; Intersectionality and the differential impact on marginalized groups; Gaps in policy and programmatic responses; and Strategies for promoting women's empowerment through addressing economic violence. To address economic violence against women, this paper recommends that, policymakers should strengthen legal frameworks, promote gender equality in education and employment, and empower women through access to resources. Additionally, challenging discriminatory social norms, investing in social safety nets, and strengthening data collection and research are crucial steps. Effective implementation of these recommendations will require multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, NGOs, international organizations, and the private sector.

Keywords: Economic violence, women's empowerment, persistent barrier, developing nations

Introduction

In the discourse surrounding global development, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment remains a central goal. However, despite strides made in various areas, women in developing countries continue to face significant challenges, particularly concerning economic participation and autonomy. Among these challenges, economic violence emerges as a critical yet often overlooked barrier impeding women's empowerment.

Economic violence encompasses a range of coercive and discriminatory practices within economic systems that systematically disadvantage women. These practices include unequal pay, limited access to financial resources and property rights, and exploitative working conditions, among others. Such forms of violence not only undermine women's economic independence but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization, hindering broader efforts for sustainable development.

Recent research underscores the persistence and multifaceted nature of economic violence against women in developing countries. Studies highlight how structural inequalities, fueled by patriarchal norms and inadequate legal protections, perpetuate economic violence and limit women's opportunities for advancement. For example, Chant (2021) emphasizes the interconnectedness between the feminization of poverty and the inadequacy of anti-poverty programs in addressing the unique challenges faced by women. Furthermore, Sen and Östlin (2020) argue that gender inequities in health exacerbate the economic vulnerabilities of women in developing countries, further entrenching patterns of economic violence. These intersecting factors create complex barriers that hinder women's ability to access resources, participate in decision-making processes, and fully engage in economic activities.

Efforts to address economic violence and promote women's empowerment require comprehensive strategies that tackle both the root causes and systemic manifestations of gender-based inequalities. Agarwal (2021) suggests that land rights for women are crucial for challenging patriarchal structures and enhancing economic autonomy. Similarly, Duflo (2020) highlights the importance of women's empowerment in driving economic development and poverty reduction efforts. However, despite growing recognition of the issue, gaps persist in both policy and practice. There is a need for targeted interventions that address the structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, including discriminatory laws and social norms. Additionally, investments in education, healthcare, and access to financial services are essential for enhancing women's economic agency and resilience.

This paper delves into the phenomenon of economic violence against women in developing countries, drawing on recent empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. By examining the underlying dynamics and impacts of economic violence, we seek to contribute to ongoing discussions and efforts aimed at fostering gender equality and inclusive development in the global South.

Despite growing recognition of the pervasive nature of economic violence against women in developing countries, efforts to address this issue remain fragmented and insufficient. Existing interventions often fail to adequately address the structural inequalities and intersecting factors that perpetuate economic violence and hinder women's empowerment. This gap between awareness and action underscores the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to addressing economic violence as a persistent barrier to women's empowerment in the global South. Key challenges include:

Lack of Legal Protections: Many developing countries lack robust legal frameworks to protect women's rights in the economic sphere, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination in the workplace and beyond.

Gender Inequities in Access to Resources: Unequal access to land, credit, and other resources further exacerbates economic disparities between men and women, limiting women's economic agency and opportunities for advancement.

Normative Barriers: Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and cultural practices perpetuate gender-based inequalities, reinforcing patterns of economic violence and limiting women's ability to challenge traditional gender roles.

Intersectional Dynamics: Economic violence intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race, ethnicity, and class, further marginalizing vulnerable groups of women and exacerbating their economic vulnerabilities.

Limited Data and Research: Despite the growing recognition of economic violence as a barrier to women's empowerment, there remains a dearth of comprehensive data and research on the prevalence, drivers, and impacts of economic violence in developing countries.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that goes beyond surface-level interventions to tackle the underlying structural barriers and power dynamics that perpetuate economic violence. Moreover, it necessitates collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and international development actors to enact policy reforms, promote gender-sensitive programming, and challenge entrenched gender norms and practices.

In this context, this paper seeks to explore the complexities of economic violence as a persistent barrier to women's empowerment in developing countries, with a focus on identifying key challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality and inclusive development agendas. By critically examining the root causes and systemic manifestations of economic violence, we aim to inform policy and practice initiatives aimed at addressing this critical issue and promoting women's rights and empowerment worldwide.

Objectives of the Study

To Assess the Prevalence and Forms of Economic Violence: This study investigated the prevalence and various forms of economic violence experienced by women in developing countries, including but not limited to unequal pay, limited access to resources, and exploitative working conditions.

1. **To Identify Key Drivers and Structural Barriers:** By analyzing the underlying drivers and structural barriers that perpetuate economic violence against women, the study seeks to identify root causes and systemic factors contributing to gender-based inequalities in the economic sphere.
2. **To Explore Intersectional Dynamics:** Recognizing the intersecting nature of oppression, the study will examine how economic violence intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, and class, and its differential impacts on marginalized groups of women.
3. **To Examine Policy and Programmatic Responses:** The study will critically evaluate existing policy and programmatic responses to economic violence, assessing their effectiveness, gaps, and limitations in addressing the needs and rights of women in developing countries.
4. **To Generate Evidence for Advocacy and Action:** By generating empirical evidence and insights, the study aims to contribute to advocacy efforts aimed at raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and driving policy reforms to address economic violence and promote women's empowerment.

5. To Inform Gender-Sensitive Interventions: Drawing on the findings, the study will provide recommendations for designing and implementing gender-sensitive interventions and programming aimed at preventing economic violence and enhancing women's economic agency and opportunities for advancement.

Overall, the objectives of this study are to deepen our understanding of economic violence as a persistent barrier to women's empowerment in developing countries, and to inform evidence-based strategies and actions to promote gender equality and inclusive development agendas.

Conceptual Framework

Delving into the intricate dynamics of economic violence there is a persistent impediment to women's empowerment within developing countries. Drawing upon scholarly contributions spanning gender studies, development economics, sociology, and human rights literature, we synthesize crucial concepts that offered a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of economic violence against women.

At its foundation, embracing a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) perspective, economic violence is the manifestation of gender-based discrimination and coercion disproportionately experienced by women (Sen & Östlin, 2020). Within this lens, economic violence is situated as a product of entrenched power differentials and systemic gender inequalities ingrained within socio-economic structures.

Extending beyond the GBV lens, by incorporating insights from the Structural Violence perspective. This lens illuminates economic violence as a manifestation of broader structural inequalities, wherein social, economic, and political systems perpetuate systematic disadvantages faced by women (Farmer, 2020). Within this framework, economic violence emerges not merely as isolated acts, but as embedded within societal structures that perpetuate oppression and marginalization.

Moreover, integrating Inter-sectionality Theory to comprehend the intersecting axes of oppression shaping women's experiences of economic violence. By acknowledging the interplay of gender with other dimensions such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, inter-sectionality offers a comprehensive analysis of the diverse manifestations and impacts of economic violence (Crenshaw, 2021).

Complementing these lenses, a Human Rights approach frames economic violence as a violation of women's fundamental rights, including the rights to equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Anchored in international human rights instruments such as CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, this approach underscores the imperative of addressing economic violence within a broader rights-based framework (UN Women, 2020).

Through the synthesis of these conceptual frameworks, our paper endeavors to unravel the intricate web of structural inequalities, power dynamics, and human rights violations perpetuating economic violence against women in developing countries. This interdisciplinary perspective not only enriches scholarly discourse but also informs evidence-based interventions aimed at dismantling systemic barriers and fostering gender equality and social justice.

Definitions of Economic Violence

The concept of economic violence has garnered increasing attention in scholarly literature, reflecting a growing recognition of the multifaceted ways in which economic systems can perpetuate harm and exploitation, particularly against women. Recent studies have offered various definitions and conceptualizations of economic violence, shedding light on its nuanced manifestations and impacts.

Das and Chakraborty (2021) advocate for an intersectional analysis of economic violence, emphasizing its interconnectedness with other forms of oppression. They highlight how economic violence operates within broader systems of inequality, intersecting with factors such as race, class, and gender to exacerbate vulnerabilities and marginalization.

Naved and Persson (2020) examine the linkages between economic violence and women's reproductive health, offering insights into the ways in which economic disparities can impact access to reproductive healthcare services and decision-making autonomy. Their work underscores the importance of understanding economic violence within the context of women's broader health and well-being.

Perez (2020) contributes to the conceptualization of economic violence by examining its manifestations in the Colombian context. Through qualitative analysis, Perez elucidates how economic violence manifests in various forms, including financial control, exploitation, and deprivation of resources, highlighting the need for context-specific understandings of this phenomenon.

Bhandari and Thapa (2021) explore the dynamics of economic violence in Nepal, offering insights into its underlying drivers and consequences. Their study uncovers the ways in which economic disparities intersect with social norms and structural inequalities to perpetuate violence against women, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to address these systemic barriers.

González-Olivares and Amaro-Herrera (2021) present a conceptual framework and measurement approach for economic violence, emphasizing the importance of capturing its diverse dimensions and impacts. Their work contributes to the development of comprehensive tools for assessing economic violence, facilitating more nuanced analysis and policy responses.

Collectively, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of economic violence by offering diverse definitions and conceptualizations that capture its complexity and contextual specificity. By illuminating the interconnectedness between economic systems, social structures, and individual experiences, they provide valuable insights for informing interventions aimed at addressing this pervasive form of violence against women.

Women's Empowerment in Developing Countries

Africa:

In Africa, women's empowerment is deeply intertwined with cultural norms, socio-economic structures, and political contexts (Tripp, 2020). While progress has been made in some areas, such as access to education and healthcare, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Kabeer, 2019). Gender-based violence, including practices like female genital mutilation and child marriage, remains prevalent, hindering women's autonomy and opportunities for empowerment (Perez, 2020). Political participation, though improving, is often hindered by systemic barriers, including discriminatory laws and lack of representation in decision-making bodies (Tripp, 2020). Efforts to advance women's empowerment in Africa require comprehensive strategies that address both structural inequalities and cultural norms, ensuring inclusivity and meaningful participation of women in all spheres of society (Kabeer, 2019).

Asia:

In Asia, women's empowerment efforts intersect with diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic contexts (Duflo, 2020). While some countries have made significant strides in promoting gender equality and women's rights, disparities persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Duflo, 2020). Access to education and healthcare varies widely across the region, with women from disadvantaged backgrounds facing greater barriers (UNESCO, 2020). Economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance and entrepreneurship programs, have shown promise in enhancing women's economic independence and agency (Duflo, 2020). However, challenges remain in addressing deep-rooted patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender inequality (Duflo, 2020). Efforts to advance women's empowerment in Asia require tailored approaches that take into account the

diverse needs and contexts of women across the region, while also addressing underlying structural barriers to equality (UNESCO, 2020).

South America:

In South America, women's empowerment efforts are shaped by complex dynamics of poverty, inequality, and indigenous rights (World Bank, 2020). While progress has been made in expanding access to education and healthcare, disparities persist, particularly among indigenous and Afro-descendant women (World Bank, 2020). Economic empowerment programs aim to address these disparities by providing women with access to financial resources and entrepreneurial opportunities (World Bank, 2020). However, challenges remain in tackling structural barriers, including discriminatory laws and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality (World Bank, 2020). Moreover, gender-based violence continues to be a significant issue, with high rates of femicide and domestic violence affecting women across the region (World Bank, 2020). Efforts to advance women's empowerment in South America must be context-specific and inclusive, recognizing the intersectional nature of women's experiences and addressing the root causes of inequality (World Bank, 2020).

Link between Economic Violence and Women's Empowerment

Economic violence against women represents a significant impediment to their empowerment, posing multifaceted challenges to their socio-economic well-being and agency. Recent scholarly research has illuminated the intricate relationship between economic violence and women's empowerment, providing insights into various dimensions of this connection.

Structural Inequalities and Economic Violence:

Research underscores that economic violence often originates from entrenched structural inequalities, including disparities in access to resources, discriminatory labor practices, and limited economic opportunities for women (González-Olivares & Amaro-Herrera, 2021). These structural barriers perpetuate economic dependence and reinforce gender-based disparities, thereby thwarting women's empowerment efforts.

Impact on Economic Autonomy:

Studies highlight how economic violence undermines women's attainment of economic autonomy and financial independence. Factors such as wage discrimination, unequal division of unpaid care work, and restricted access to financial resources curtail women's control over their economic lives, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence (Das & Chakraborty, 2021).

Intersectionality and Differential Impacts:

Intersectionality theory elucidates how economic violence affects women differently based on intersecting forms of oppression. Women belonging to marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and low-income communities, encounter compounded barriers to empowerment due to intersecting discrimination (Naved & Persson, 2020).

Health and Well-being:

Economic violence significantly impacts women's health and well-being. Limited access to financial resources and economic opportunities restricts women's ability to access essential healthcare services, exacerbating health disparities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and ill-health (Perez, 2020).

Policy Responses and Interventions:

Addressing economic violence necessitates comprehensive policy responses and interventions aimed at tackling its root causes. Strategies such as legal reforms, economic empowerment programs, and social protection measures are crucial for mitigating the impact of economic violence and fostering women's empowerment (Bhandari & Thapa, 2021).

Empowerment and Agency:

Women's empowerment transcends mere economic outcomes; it encompasses broader dimensions of agency, voice, and participation in decision-making processes. Effectively addressing economic violence is paramount for enhancing women's agency and enabling their full participation in social, economic, and political spheres (Sen & Östlin, 2020).

The link between economic violence and women's empowerment is multifaceted and complex, influenced by structural inequalities, intersecting forms of oppression, and socio-cultural norms. Addressing economic violence is essential for advancing gender equality and promoting women's empowerment, necessitating holistic approaches that address its root causes and promote inclusive development agendas.

Factors contributing to Economic Violence

Economic violence against women is influenced by a multitude of factors, including cultural norms and gender roles, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, legal and policy frameworks, and gender inequality in economic systems. Recent scholarship has explored these interconnected dynamics, shedding light on the complex relationship between these factors and economic violence against women.

Cultural norms and gender roles play a significant role in perpetuating economic violence against women. In many societies, patriarchal norms dictate that women's primary roles revolve around caregiving and domestic responsibilities, limiting their access to economic opportunities (Perez, 2020). These entrenched gender norms often reinforce economic dependence on male family members and perpetuate cycles of economic violence.

Limited access to education and employment opportunities exacerbates economic vulnerability among women. Educational disparities, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, restrict women's ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for economic independence (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, discriminatory hiring practices and gender-based wage gaps further impede women's access to decent and equitable employment (Duflo, 2020).

The legal and policy frameworks within a society significantly shape women's economic rights and protections. Inadequate legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms fail to address economic violence effectively, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination (González-Olivares & Amaro-Herrera, 2021). Furthermore, discriminatory laws and practices, such as unequal property rights and inheritance laws, perpetuate economic inequalities and contribute to economic violence against women.

Gender inequality within economic systems perpetuates economic violence by reinforcing disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power. Structural barriers, including limited access to financial services and assets, restrict women's economic agency and perpetuate their economic dependence (Das & Chakraborty, 2021). Additionally, gender biases in economic policies and practices further entrench inequalities and contribute to the marginalization of women in economic spheres.

Economic violence against women is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including cultural norms, educational and employment opportunities, legal frameworks, and gender inequalities within economic systems. Addressing economic violence requires comprehensive strategies that challenge entrenched gender norms, promote equitable access to

education and employment, strengthen legal protections, and dismantle systemic barriers to gender equality in economic systems.

Impacts and Consequences of Economic Violence

Economic violence against women exacts a profound toll, manifesting in a myriad of impacts and consequences that reverberate across individual, familial, and societal spheres. Recent scholarly research has delved into these multifaceted dimensions, elucidating the far-reaching implications of economic violence on women's lives.

Economic dependence and poverty are among the primary consequences of economic violence. Women subjected to economic abuse often find themselves trapped in cycles of financial insecurity, unable to access resources or make autonomous financial decisions (Das & Chakraborty, 2021). This perpetuates their reliance on abusive partners or family members, exacerbating their vulnerability to poverty and economic exploitation.

Limited decision-making power is another significant repercussion of economic violence. Women experiencing economic abuse often face constraints on their ability to make choices about their own lives, including decisions related to employment, finances, and household matters (Perez, 2020). This curtails their autonomy and perpetuates their subordination within familial and societal structures.

Economic violence also takes a toll on women's health and well-being. The stress and trauma associated with economic abuse can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and other psychological disorders (Naved & Persson, 2020). Moreover, limited access to financial resources may impede women's ability to access healthcare services, exacerbating health disparities and compromising their overall well-being.

Inter-generational effects further compound the consequences of economic violence. Children growing up in households marked by economic abuse often experience adverse outcomes, including poor educational attainment, limited economic opportunities, and higher likelihood of perpetuating cycles of violence in their own relationships (Perez, 2020). This perpetuates inter-generational cycles of poverty and abuse, further entrenching socio-economic inequalities.

Economic violence against women has far-reaching impacts and consequences that extend beyond individual experiences to encompass broader societal dynamics. Addressing economic violence requires comprehensive strategies that not only address immediate needs and provide support to survivors but also tackle underlying structural inequalities and promote gender equality in all spheres of society.

Conclusion

Economic violence stands as a formidable obstacle to achieving women's empowerment, particularly in developing countries. It manifests in various forms, from unequal pay to limited access to resources, and reinforces cycles of poverty and marginalization. By analysing the root causes, including entrenched gender norms, inadequate legal protections, and limited educational and employment opportunities, the paper underscores the need for a multifaceted approach.

Addressing economic violence necessitates a coordinated effort. Legal reforms that safeguard women's economic rights are crucial, alongside investments in education, healthcare, and access to financial resources. Dismantling discriminatory social norms and promoting gender equality in all spheres is equally important. The far-reaching consequences of economic violence extend beyond individual experiences, impacting families and hindering broader societal development. This paper emphasizes the urgency of tackling economic violence to achieve true gender equality and inclusive development in the global South. By critically examining this issue

and proposing comprehensive strategies, the paper aims to inform policy and interventions that empower women, fostering a future where they can fully participate and thrive in all aspects of society.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, here are some proposed policy recommendations:

1. **Strengthen legal frameworks:** Implement and enforce laws that protect women's economic rights, including equal pay, property rights, and access to financial services.
2. **Promote gender equality in education and employment:** Increase access to education for girls and women, focusing on skills development and financial literacy. Enact policies to address discriminatory hiring practices and promote equal pay for equal work.
3. **Empower women through access to resources:** Facilitate access to land ownership, credit, and financial services for women, particularly those in rural areas and marginalized communities.
4. **Challenge discriminatory social norms:** Implement awareness campaigns and social programs to challenge traditional gender roles and norms that perpetuate economic dependence and violence.
5. **Invest in social safety nets:** Provide social safety nets, such as childcare services and unemployment benefits, to support women experiencing economic abuse and enable them to leave abusive situations.
6. **Strengthen data collection and research:** Invest in collecting comprehensive data on the prevalence and impacts of economic violence to inform targeted interventions and policy development.
7. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between governments, NGOs, international organizations, and the private sector to develop and implement effective strategies to address economic violence.

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